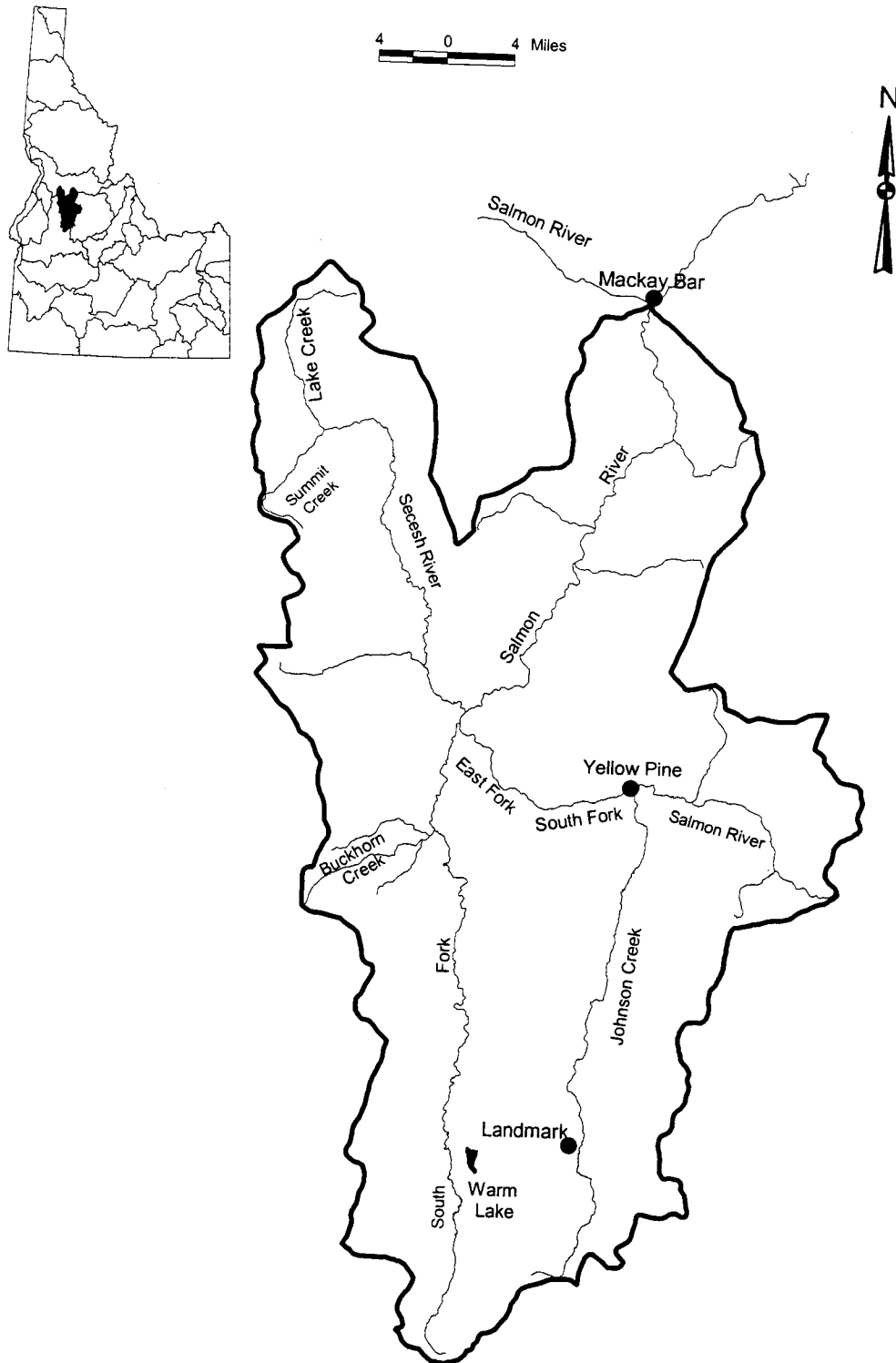


# Salmon River Drainage

## South Fork



## 9. SOUTH FORK SALMON RIVER DRAINAGE

### A. Overview

The South Fork Salmon River (SFSR) drainage lies in central Idaho in Valley and Idaho counties. The drainage flows northerly through the Idaho batholith and enters the Salmon River at Mackay Bar. Elevations vary from 9,280 feet msl at North Loon Mountain to 2,166 feet msl at the mouth.

The land is characterized by extreme changes in elevation and aspect within short distances. Topography varies from steep canyon lands to meadows. The Idaho batholith soils consist largely of weathered granitic sands and fines and are sensitive to disturbance. Precipitation averages 32 inches annually, with major storm events occurring about every ten years.

Resident fish species, including rainbow trout, cutthroat trout, bull trout, mountain whitefish, brook trout, lake trout, kokanee, and numerous nongame fish species, occupy 515 miles of streams and 37 lakes. They provide popular fisheries for many anglers.

Principal tributaries to the SFSR are the Secesh River, the East Fork South Fork Salmon River and its tributary, Johnson Creek. Warm Lake is the largest lake, measuring 640 surface acres; all others are alpine lakes and range in size from 1 to 160 acres.

Anadromous fish species (chinook salmon, steelhead trout) have access to most of the drainage. Historically, the steelhead spawning run exceeded 3,000 fish. The East Fork South Fork Salmon River historically supported the largest summer chinook run in the state of Idaho. Salmon fishing was a major economic resource in the SFSR prior to 1965, when anglers harvested 1,700-4,000 salmon annually. Steelhead anglers harvested 750-800 fish per year. These runs have dwindled considerably since then, and run sizes are about one-tenth of their former abundance. The seasons were closed in 1965 for chinook and in 1968 for steelhead. The decrease in numbers of SFSR chinook and steelhead were caused by two major problems: 1) logging and road construction activities created unstable soil conditions in the SFSR that have damaged the aquatic habitat, and 2) serious fish passage problems and increased mortality caused by construction of hydroelectric dams on the lower Snake and Columbia rivers.

The SFSR is one of only four drainages in the Columbia Basin that supports populations of wild, native steelhead classified as B-run. These fish are predominantly large steelhead, which spend two or three years in the ocean, compared to the smaller A-run steelhead which inhabit much of the rest of the Salmon River drainage. Preservation of this native gene pool is a high priority. Following harvest closures on cutthroat trout (1985) and bull trout (1994), and cessation of hatchery trout stocking (1993), steelhead parr became the targeted fish harvested under general bag limits. This instigated the change to a drainage-wide catch-and-release regulation, implemented in 1998.

Hatchery production of summer chinook began at McCall Fish Hatchery in 1980 as part of the mitigation for lost natural escapement by operation of the lower Snake River dams. The hatchery has the capacity to produce one million smolts when adequate number of adult salmon return to the trapping facility, located in the upper river. In 1997 and 2000 surplus hatchery-origin adult summer chinook salmon returned to the SFSR, exceeding

needs for hatchery production. A sport fishing season was opened in both years to harvest these excess hatchery fish, and therefore limit their spawning with wild/natural salmon. Chinook supplementation research in the upper river (Stolle Meadows) has been ongoing since 1992 to evaluate supplementation activities. The goal supplementation is to preserve to the native gene pool and improve productivity of the hatchery-augmented natural population. Outplant of hatchery summer chinook adults did occur in 1997 and 2000 with an objective to recycle surplus fish through sport and tribal fisheries to increase harvest opportunity. In 2000, surplus hatchery salmon were also outplanted into headwater reaches of the East Fork South Fork Salmon River within the reclaimed Stibnite Mine area, to spawn naturally. The Nez Perce Tribe began hatchery production of summer chinook in Johnson Creek in 1998, relying on shared use of the McCall hatchery. No hatchery-origin anadromous juvenile or adult fish have been planted in the Secesh River to preserve the native gene pool.

Resident salmonids were seriously impacted by aquatic habitat degradation, as well as excessive harvest. Catch-and-release regulations, implemented in 1998, have increased protection of these populations.

## B. Objectives and Programs

1. Objective: Preserve genetic integrity of wild, native steelhead and summer chinook.

Program: Do not outplant any hatchery steelhead into the South Fork Salmon River or hatchery summer chinook into the Secesh River. Manage hatchery-supplemented Salmon River steelhead and spring chinook stocks to minimize straying into the South Fork Salmon River. Minimize straying of South Fork Salmon River hatchery summer chinook into the Secesh River.

Program: Work with the Nez Perce and Shoshone-Bannock Tribes to develop hatchery fish release programs that preserve and protect genetic resources of naturally-spawning salmon and steelhead populations.

2. Objective: Maintain existing natural spawning populations of salmon and steelhead.

Program: Allow natural production to sustain existing naturally produced populations. Limit outplanting of hatchery summer chinook, other than direct hatchery releases, to support supplementation research.

3. Objective: Maintain and improve habitat quality of mainstem and tributary production areas.

Program: Oppose land use activities that further degrade the quality of natural production areas. Participate in timber management proposals. Encourage implementation of grazing management plans, to eliminate negative grazing impacts to fishery productivity and survival. Participate in interagency mining oversight committees to review operating plans and work with regulatory agencies to require strict compliance with mining laws to protect water quality and fish populations. Develop monitoring programs for fish populations and fish habitat

relative to land management activities, if needed. Continue to monitor and evaluate benefits from habitat improvement projects.

4. Objective: Preserve genetic integrity of wild, native cutthroat trout and bull trout. Maintain conservation management to increase population sizes.

Program: Maintain catch-and-release fisheries throughout the drainage.

5. Objective: Provide information and education of fisheries management objectives for the drainage.

Program: Continue to develop and distribute fisheries information and regulation signs to increase compliance and support.

Drainage: SOUTH FORK SALMON RIVER					
Water	Miles/acre	Fishery			Management Direction
		Type	Species Present	Management	
South Fork, entire drainage		Coldwater Anadromous	Chinook salmon Steelhead	Conservation	<p>Increase anadromous fish runs to historic spawning areas. Improve aquatic habitat by discouraging land management activities, which may degrade the environment further. Increase steelhead runs to historic spawning areas. No harvest of naturally produced salmon and steelhead.</p> <p>Enhance populations of wild trout through continued catch-and-release regulations. Increase conservation of wild trout by restricting whitefish harvest to stream season, and by promoting harvest of brook trout. Participate in land management plans to promote maintenance of instream and riparian habitats to support and enhance fish populations.</p> <p>Closed to harvest.</p>
		Resident	Redband trout Cutthroat trout	Conservation	
			Mountain whitefish Brook trout	General	
			Bull trout	Conservation	
South Fork from mouth to Secesh River, including tributaries	162/	Coldwater/ Anadromous	Chinook salmon Steelhead	Conservation	<p>Promote enhancement and maintenance of overwinter habitat migration corridor, and access to tributaries for spawning and rearing. Catch and release.</p> <p>Closed to harvest.</p>
		Resident	Redband trout Cutthroat trout	Conservation	
			Mountain whitefish Brook trout	General	
			Bull trout	Conservation	

South Fork from Secesh River to Goat Creek		Coldwater/ Anadromous	Chinook salmon Steelhead	Conservation	Preserve genetic integrity of wild chinook salmon population downstream of Goat Creek.
		Resident	Redband trout Cutthroat trout	Conservation	Catch and release.
			Mountain whitefish Brook trout	General	
			Bull trout	Conservation	Closed to harvest.
South Fork from Goat Creek to chinook weir		Coldwater/ Anadromous	Chinook salmon Steelhead	Conservation/ Anadromous	Manage chinook salmon as hatchery influenced. Promote harvest of hatchery salmon when escapement to weir is adequate for continued production of one million smolts. Promote production of naturally spawning chinook.
		Resident	Redband trout Cutthroat trout	Conservation	Catch and release.
			Mountain whitefish Brook trout	General	
			Bull trout	Conservation	Closed to harvest..
South Fork from chinook weir to headwaters		Coldwater/ Anadromous	Chinook salmon Steelhead	Conservation	Continue Idaho Supplementation studies to evaluate hatchery and natural chinook.
		Resident	Redband trout Cutthroat trout	Conservation	Catch and release.
			Mountain whitefish Brook trout	General	
			Bull trout	Conservation	Closed to harvest.

Secesh River and tributaries	93/	Coldwater/ Anadromous	Chinook salmon	Conservation	<p>Maintain as a genetic refuge to preserve wild characteristics of anadromous populations. Develop management plan for conservation easement in Burgdorf Meadow. Obtain additional conservation easements to restore/preserve critical spawning reaches.</p> <p>Catch and release.</p> <p>Closed to harvest.</p>
			Steelhead		
			Cutthroat trout	Conservation	
			Redband trout		
East Fork South Fork Salmon River and tributaries , mouth to Sugar Creek (excluding Johnson Creek and tributaries)	86/	Coldwater/ Anadromous	Brook trout	General	<p>Increase wild salmon and steelhead runs to historic spawning areas.</p> <p>Catch and release.</p> <p>Closed to harvest.</p>
			Mountain whitefish		
			Bull trout	Conservation	
			Chinook salmon	Conservation	<p>Increase wild salmon and steelhead runs to historic spawning areas.</p> <p>Catch and release.</p> <p>Closed to harvest.</p>
			Steelhead		
			Cutthroat trout	Conservation	
			Rainbow trout		
			Brook trout	General	<p>Increase wild salmon and steelhead runs to historic spawning areas.</p> <p>Catch and release.</p> <p>Closed to harvest.</p>
			Mountain whitefish		
			Bull trout	Conservation	

East Fork South Fork and tributaries, Sugar Creek to headwaters		Coldwater/ Anadromous	Chinook salmon Steelhead	Conservation	Participate in mining reclamation projects and monitoring fish population responses.
			Cutthroat trout Redband trout	Conservation	Catch and release.
			Brook trout Mountain whitefish	General	
			Bull trout	Conservation	Closed to harvest.
Johnson Creek and tributaries	54/	Coldwater/ Anadromous	Chinook salmon Steelhead	Conservation	Work with the Nez Perce Tribe to develop hatchery supplementation program that preserves genetic resources and fitness of naturally spawning Chinook. Utilize McCall Hatchery as feasible.
			Cutthroat trout Redband trout	Conservation	Catch and release.
			Brook trout Mountain whitefish	General	
			Bull trout	Conservation	Closed to harvest.
Warm Lake	/640	Coldwater	Rainbow trout Lake trout Brook trout Kokanee	General	Maintain current catchable rainbow trout stocking.
			Bull trout	Conservation	Closed to harvest.
Alpine lakes (36 in South Fork Salmon River drainage)	/890	Coldwater	Rainbow trout Brook trout Cutthroat trout Arctic grayling Golden trout	General/Trophy	Maintenance stocking with salmonid fry on a three-year rotation. Plant only westslope cutthroat trout strain or sterile rainbow trout to reduce competition/ hybridization with native cutthroat trout. Develop trophy lakes that have shown exceptional growth potential. Provide diverse opportunity for species and sizes. Collect baseline information on stocking success in cooperation with Forest Service.